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THE SOVIET FRAMEWORK FOR OPERATIONS:

THE TERMINOLOGY OF WAR

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THE SOVIET FRAMEWORK FOR OPERATIONS:

The Terminology of War

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The views expressed here are those of the
Soviet Army Studies Office. They should not
necessarily be construed as validated threat doctrine.

Soviet operational art, by definition, encompasses the planning, preparation, and conduct of operations within distinct geographical limits for the purpose of achieving military aims and objectives commensurate with the political goals of the nation. National political goals dictate the strategic nature and form of an operation and, hence, establish the context for operational and tactical measures necessary to achieve the strategic goals. To define the relationship between distinct levels of war, the Soviets have developed an elaborate set of terms related to war aims, the geographical arena of operations, and the size and nature of engaged forces. These terms provide a framework essential for understanding the nature of past, contemporary, and future operations, (see table 1).

MISSIONS

The strategic aim [strategicheskaya tsel'] of any conflict dictates the nature, scope, and form of military operations. Established by the political leadership of the nation, strategic aims represent the desired end of strategic scale military actions. Achievement of strategic aims generally leads to significant, and sometimes fundamental, changes in military-political and strategic conditions which, in turn, can contribute to the victorious conclusion of a war. The Soviets subdivide strategic aims into overall [obshchie] strategic aims, which represent the "fundamental results of the war," and particular [chasnyye] strategic aims, which result from successful campaigns or strategic operations. The strategic war aims determine the size and nature of strategic groupings of forces within a theater of military operations or



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Table Relationship of Terminology with Mission, Territory, Action, and Force				
MISSIONS	TERRITORY	ACTIONS	FORCE*	
Strategic Aim	Theater of military Operations (TVD)	Strategic operation	High Command of forces in a TVD (group of <u>fronts</u>)	
Strategic Mission	Strategic direction	<u>Front</u> operation**	Operational-strategic large unit (<u>front</u>)	
Operational Mission	Operational direction	Army operation battle (<u>srazhenie</u>)	Operational large unit (army)	Operational formation (airborne division)
			Operational-tactical large unit (corps)	Operational-tactical formation (corps)
Tactical Mission		Battle (boi)		Tactical formation (division)
			Unit (regiment) Subunit (battalion)	

*Units and formations can help perform missions at a range of levels. Thus an airborne division, although it is an operational formation can perform a tactical, operational, or strategic mission. Mission transcends all other considerations.

** also includes air, air defense and airborne/naval landing operations, and in some cases, strategic nuclear strikes in the theater.

Table 1. Relationship of Terminology with Mission, Territory, Action, and Force

on a strategic direction and determine the form of military actions undertaken. The mission transcends all other considerations.

TERRITORY

Strategic aims are achieved by warfare conducted in theaters of war and theaters of military operations.² The theater of war [teatr voyny] is a region, usually of continental size with adjacent oceans and airspace, where nations, or coalitions of nations, conduct operations on a strategic scale.

A theater of war lacks distinct geographical boundaries but usually encompasses several theaters of military operations (for example, Western Europe from the North Cape of Norway to the Mediterranean Sea). A theater of military operations [teatr voennykh deistvii-TVD] is a portion of a continent with associated coastal areas, inland seas, and airspace, within whose limits strategic groupings of forces (air, land, or sea) deploy and conduct military operations (for example, Central Europe from the Baltic Sea to the Alps). The size, geographical limits, and composition of a theater of military operations are determined by a nation's political and military leadership and depend on the nature of strategic aims, the location of important strategic objectives, and the possibilities for deploying and employing large strategic groupings of forces in the region.

Within theaters of military operations are strategic directions [strategicheskie napravleniya], extensive areas within which large groups of forces can deploy and conduct operations to accomplish strategic missions (for example, the Northern German plain approach to

Western Europe on an axis Berlin-Hannover-the Ruhr-Brussels-Antwerp).³ Strategic missions [strategicheskie zadachi], are component parts of a strategic aim. They are large scale and fundamentally important tasks whose successful fulfillment can produce sharply changed conditions within a theater of military operations or on a strategic direction. Successful accomplishment of strategic missions contributes to the achievement of particular aims or the overall strategic aim.⁴ Strategic groupings of forces consisting of fronts, armies, and divisions of various types of forces operate on strategic directions in order to fulfill strategic missions.

The Soviets further subdivide strategic directions into operational directions [operatsionnye napravleniia], which are territorial sectors with associated coastlines and airspace in which important operational objectives are located.⁵ Fronts, armies, divisions, and units of all types conduct operations on operational directions to accomplish operational missions. Operational missions [operativnye zadachi], when successfully accomplished, contribute to successful conduct of the entire strategic operation, and usually require that specific operational objectives be achieved within a specified period of time.⁶

Thus strategic aims, strategic missions, and operational missions are interdependent. They relate to distinct geographical arenas--the theater of military operations, the strategic direction, and the operational direction--and they are carried out by operations and forces tailored to suit precise goals.

ACTIONS

The Soviets define the operation (operatsiia), the basic building block for the conduct of war, as:

a totality of battles, strikes and maneuvers of various types of forces united by mutual aims, missions, location, and timing, conducted simultaneously or successively according to a single concept or plan aimed at accomplishing missions in a theater of military operations, on a strategic direction or operational directions----in a predetermined period of time.⁷

Within and below the operational level, the Soviets categorize and define a range of combat actions that differentiate between operations of various scales and distinguish operations from tactical combat (see table 2). The operation is a basic form of combat action and can be strategic, front, or army. Based upon its forces it can be combined arms, combined, or independent; or by virtue of its orientation it can be offensive or defensive. According to its timing it can be initial or subsequent.

The basic nature of an operation and its manner of preparation and conduct "is decisively influenced" by a number of factors including:

- war aims and the nature of strategic and operational missions
- the military-economic capabilities of the nation
- the combat capabilities of opposing forces
- the physical-geographical features of the theater of military operations
- command and control systems
- the moral-political condition of the forces
- the level of operational, tactical, and political training.⁸

Table 2. Forms of Combat Action [boevye deistviia]

combat [<u>boi</u>]	an organized clash of combatant units
blow [<u>udar</u>]	a short term attack on the enemy with conventional or nuclear forces or weapons (nuclear, torpedo, main, frontal, flank)
battle [<u>srazhenie</u>]	an aggregate of combat and blows aimed at achieving operational aims or particular objectives. The basic form of army combat actions.
operation [<u>operatsiia</u>]	actions conducted by large operational units (<u>front</u> , army); an aggregate of combat, blows, and battles conducted in a theater of military operations or on a strategic (operational) axis, with mutual and interconnected aims, locations, and timing, according to a single concept or plan aimed at achieving strategic, operational-strategic, or operational objectives (strategic, <u>front</u> , army, flotilla)
systematic combat [<u>sistematicheskie</u> <u>boevye deistviia</u>]	actions conducted with limited missions and aims during the intervals between major operations (reconnaissance, air attacks, counterattacks, radio-electronic combat, etc.)

The Soviets define the largest scale operation, the strategic operation [strategicheskaya operatsiya], as a "totality of operations, strikes and combat actions united by aims, mission, place and time, of large units [fronts, armies] and formations [divisions] of various types of armed forces, conducted according to a single concept or plan in order to achieve strategic aims."⁹ In modern war the strategic operation is the basic form of strategic combat action conducted in a continental (oceanic) theater of military operations. It usually involves the participation of several fronts (fleets), strategic nuclear forces, aviation formations, and air defense forces. A strategic operation may be either offensive or defensive and may also be used to repel an enemy attack from the air or outer space (cosmos). (Since 1980 the Soviets have included the COSMOS (space) in this definition.) Each front participating in a strategic operation "can conduct successively two or more front operations."¹⁰ Thus a strategic operation within a TVD will consist of successive operations conducted with or without pause.

A strategic operation within a TVD normally consists of several front operations conducted simultaneously or successively. In its turn, a front operation consists of several army and/or corps operations. The Soviets define operations further by assigning to them certain indices (norms) related to: quantity of forces; width of combat sectors; duration of the operation; and, on the offensive, the depth and tempo of operations. Norms are descriptive rather than rigidly prescriptive; and they permit analysis of past operations, study of present operations,

and sound planning for future operations. In essence, they provide a realistic frame of reference for military planners and commanders. Norms are derived from analysis of past experience juxtaposed against changes in technology; analysis of exercises, war games, and simulations; and study of real current conditions.

A front operation [frontovaia operatsiia], a component part of a strategic operation, represents:

a totality of operations, battles, strikes, and maneuvers united by aims, mission, place, and time, conducted according to a single concept or plan by front forces in cooperation with large units [fronts, armies] and formations [divisions] of various types of armed forces.¹¹

Front operations can be either offensive or defensive.

A front offensive operation [frontovaia nastupatel'naia operatsiia] aims at "defeating enemy army groups and occupying their territory on one strategic or several operational directions within a continental theater of military operations."¹² A front defensive operation [frontovaia oboronitel'naia operatsiia] seeks to "frustrate an enemy offensive operation on a distinct strategic direction, strike a blow against his attacking force, hold on to separate regions containing important objectives, win time, economize forces, and create conditions for transition of one's own forces to a counterattack or resumption of offensive operations."¹³ Front operations can occur as a part of a strategic operation in a continental theater of military operations or as an independent operation. Front operations normally include the following types:

<u>TYPE</u>	<u>POSTURE</u>
-first and successive operations (on separate directions)	offense
-operations of first echelon armies and corps	offense and defense
-operations of second echelon armies and corps	offense and defense
- <u>front</u> counterattacks	defense
-combat actions of <u>front</u> rocket forces, artillery, air forces, air defense forces, specialized forces and <u>front</u> reserves	offense and defense
-air assault and amphibious assault operations	offense
-repulse of amphibious assaults in cooperation with naval forces	defense

Front defensive operations can be prompted by enemy offensive action or can be voluntarily undertaken as a prelude to a subsequent offensive.

Offensive and defensive front operations are composed of several distinct army operations conducted in cooperation with other front forces and naval elements.

An army operation [armeiskaja operatsija], the major component of a front operation, is conducted by a combined arms or tank army in cooperation with other armies and front forces and, when appropriate, with naval forces. Army operations can be either offensive or defensive. An army offensive operation [armeiskaja nastupatel'naja operatsija] seeks to "destroy defending enemy groups and secure regions (objectives) of operational importance," while an army defensive operation [armeiskaja oboronitel'naja operatsija] aims at "disrupting

the offensive of a superior enemy, striking blows at his forces, holding important boundaries (regions), winning time, and creating conditions for resumption of the offensive."¹⁴ Although most armies operate as a part of a front, an army can conduct independent offensive or defensive operations on separate operational directions. Army operations include combat by army first and second echelon forces, rocket forces, and artillery, aviation, air defense, specialized and army reserve forces.

Beneath the hierarchy of operations, which are given shape, substance, and a degree of coherence by strategy and operational art, exist the individual combats, attacks, and battles that complete the spectrum of combat. These lower level actions, with their associated tactical missions, are the subject of the tactical level of war.

FORCES

Parallel to and reflecting this framework for operations are organized elements within the armed forces which prepare for and conduct combat actions at the various levels of war. While there is a general correlation between the size of units, the area within which they operate, and the scope of mission they perform, that correlation is not absolute. In fact, it is ultimately the mission that a unit performs that determines the level of war within which it operates.

The Soviets use generic terms to describe elements of their armed forces force structure. Specific types of units in the force structure fall into one of several generic categories (see table 3). Each category is further defined by the type of mission the force performs and the level of war at which it operates.

Table 3. Forces

<u>Generic Terminology</u>	<u>Equivalent Force</u>
<u>Ob'edinenie</u> (union)	
operational-strategic	<u>fronts</u> (army groups, fleets)
operational	armies, flotillas, squadrons
operational-tactical	corps
<u>Soedinenie</u> (combination)	
operational	temporary operational group (airborne division)
operational-tactical	corps
tactical	division
<u>Chast'</u> (unit)	regiment
<u>Podrazdelenie</u> (sub-unit)	battalion

The largest generic category with respect to size is the large unit [ob'edinenie] (literally a unification or union) which the Soviets define as a "troop formation [formirovanie], consisting of several formations (divisions) or large units of smaller composition (armies) as well as units [chasti, regiments] and establishments."¹⁵ Based upon the composition of each of these large units and the mission which it is assigned, a large unit can be labeled operational-strategic, operational, or operational-tactical.

Operational-Strategic Large Units: Fronts

The first type of large unit, the operational-strategic large unit, consists of several operational large units, separate formations (divisions) and units (regiments) of various types of forces. The most common units in this category are fronts, fleets, and, in Western armies, army groups. Although fleets exist in peacetime, fronts are formed only in wartime (usually from forces of a military district [voennyi okrug]), which the Soviets label as territorial combined arms large units [territorial'noe obshevoiskovoe ob'edinenie] and which are responsible for preparation for wartime operations. In wartime, operational-strategic large units are normally controlled by the High Command or the theater of military operations (TVD) commander. (A TVD may be controlled by a commander with a full staff, by an operational group, or by a High Command representative.)

Operational Large Units: Armies

The second type of large unit is the operational large unit which consists of several formations (divisions) and units (regiments) from several branches of one service of the armed forces. Existing in peacetime as well as wartime, operational large units fulfill the basic operational tasks of conducting combined arms, independent, or combined operations. This category includes armies, flotillas, squadrons, and other more specialized commands. In wartime, operational large units can be part of an operational-strategic large unit (front) or they can be independent.

Operational-Tactical Large Units: Corps

The third and last category is the operational-tactical large unit which consists of formations (divisions) and units (regiments) of various types from one branch of the armed forces. Operating usually as part of an operational-strategic large unit (front) (although sometimes as part of an operational large unit [army]), this large unit performs operational-tactical and tactical missions. In wartime the operational-tactical large unit is usually part of a combined arms army or front, and in peacetime it is subordinate to a military district. Various types of corps can be operational-tactical large units.

Beneath the large unit in size and role is the formation [sopodinenie] (literally a combination). This the Soviets define as a

"troop formation [formirovanie] consisting of several units [chasti-regiments] or formations of lesser size, usually various types of forces, specialized forces, as well as security and support units (subunits)." ¹⁶ Most formations are permanent with a fixed TOE (establishment) organization. Depending on their mission, their composition, and the nature of the theater of military operations, formations can be called operational, operational-tactical, or tactical.

Operational Formation

Operational formations are usually temporary ones assigned limited scale operational or operational-strategic missions either as part of an operational-strategic large unit (front) or as an independent force (for example, an operational group in an airborne division used in an operational air landing mission subordinate to front control).

Operational-Tactical Formation

Operational-tactical formations of either permanent or temporary makeup fulfill operational-tactical or operational missions as part of an operational-strategic large unit (front) or as part of an independent force fulfilling a limited mission on a separate operational direction.

Tactical Formations

Tactical formations having permanent TOEs perform tactical missions as part of an operational large unit (army) or of an operational-tactical formation (corps). The basic units in this category are the various types of TOE divisions.

Within the large units and formations are units (chasti-regiments) and subunits [podrazdelaniye-battalions] that engage in combat at the tactical level of war.

A CASE STUDY

In May 1944 the Soviet STAVKA began planning for a projected summer campaign to clear German forces from the Soviet Union. The STAVKA planned a series of strategic operations preceeded by a period of strategic deception. The strategic deception plan called for Soviet simulation of major thrusts into the Balkans and Southern Poland and a secret strategic regrouping of forces into Belorussia, where the Soviets planned to conduct their first strategic operation.

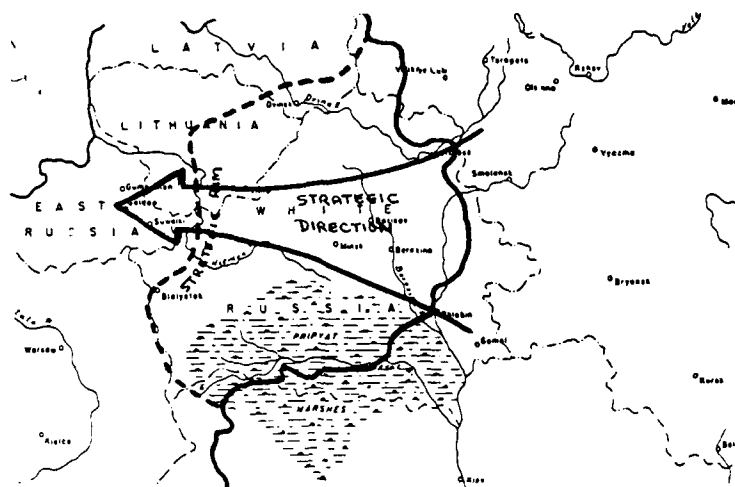
The Belorussian strategic offensive, scheduled for June 1944, sought to achieve the strategic aim of destroying German Army Group Center and expelling German forces from Belorussia, an aim which, if successfully accomplished, would hasten the end of the war. The offensive, which would be conducted by two groups of fronts, each under supervision of a STAVKA representative, would develop along the Vitebsk-Minsk-Vilnius, Bobruisk-Minsk-Bialystok and Polotsk-Dvinsk-Riga operational directions,

which, taken together, formed the Belorussian strategic direction (see map 1).

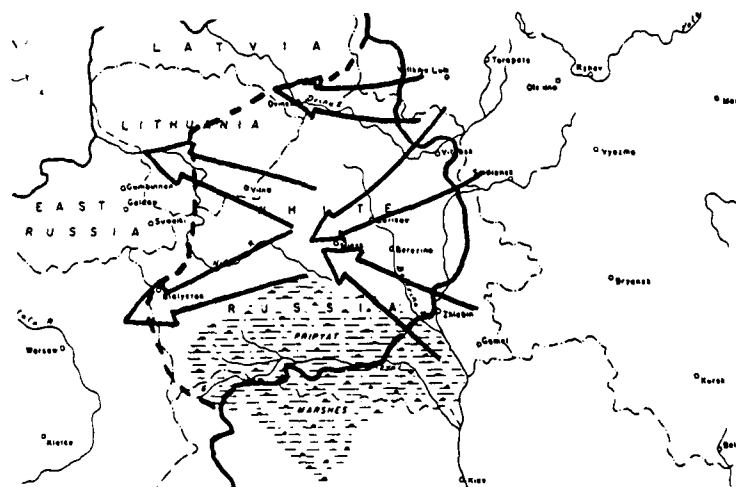
The strategic operation involved the conduct of successive envelopment operations, first of German forces at Vitebsk, Mogilev, and Bobruisk, and then of all German forces east of Minsk, followed by a broad front advance to the Polish and East Prussian borders. The strategic operation was subdivided into distinct operational phases, with each phase composed of distinct front or multi-front operations. Each front and multi-front operation was further subdivided into distinct army operations (see map 2).

During the first phase of shallow operational envelopments army tactical maneuver forces (tank corps or tank brigades) would spearhead the encirclement of German forces in Vitebsk, Mogilev, and Bobruisk. Subsequently, operational maneuver forces (several tank corps, a tank army, and two cavalry-mechanized groups) of the fronts would penetrate into the operational depths to complete the deep operational envelopment of German forces east of Minsk. Thereafter, front operational maneuver forces, supported by rifle armies, would exploit westward toward East Prussia and Poland.

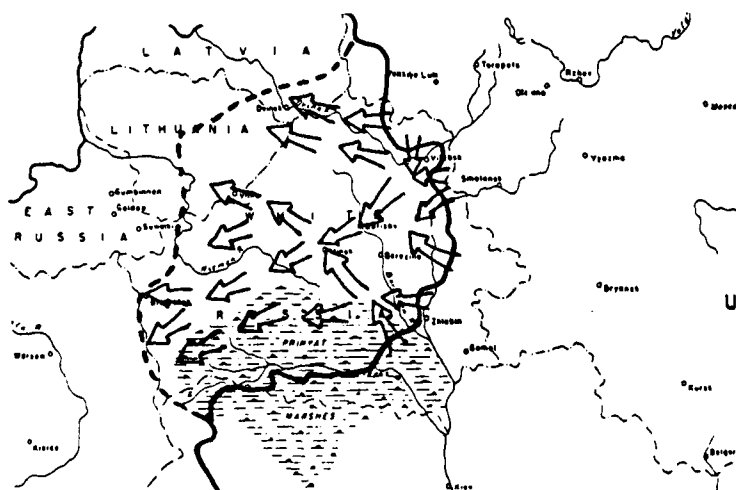
In support of the strategic operation, the Soviet command conducted operational and tactical deception to deceive the Germans regarding the timing, location, and size of the main Soviet thrusts. Groups of fronts, individual fronts, and armies effected operational and tactical regroupings to assemble requisite forces for the the offensive, and formed tactical, operational, and strategic reserves to sustain the



BELORUSSIAN OPERATION : STRATEGIC DIRECTION

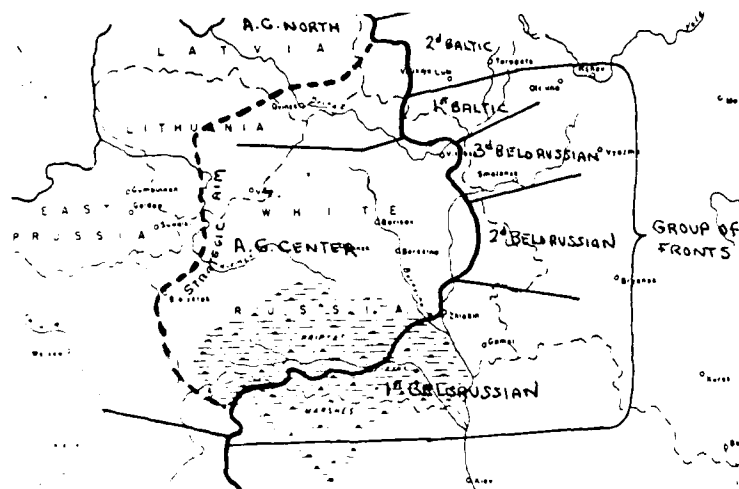


BELORUSSIAN OPERATION : OPERATIONAL DIRECTIONS

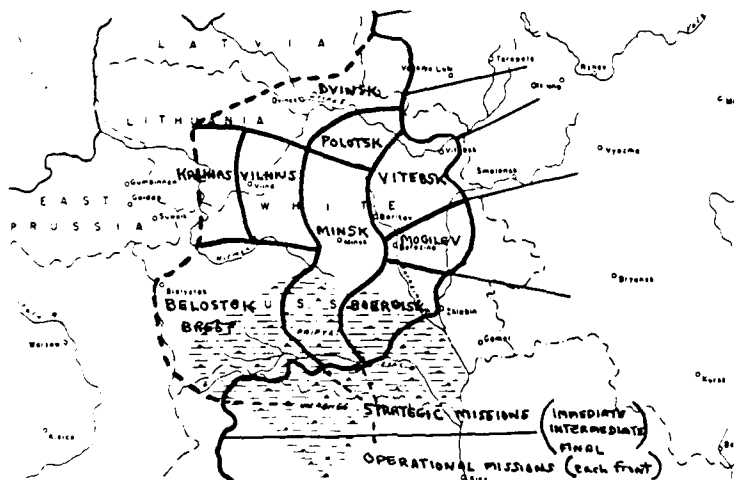


BELORUSSIAN OPERATION : TACTICAL THRUSTS

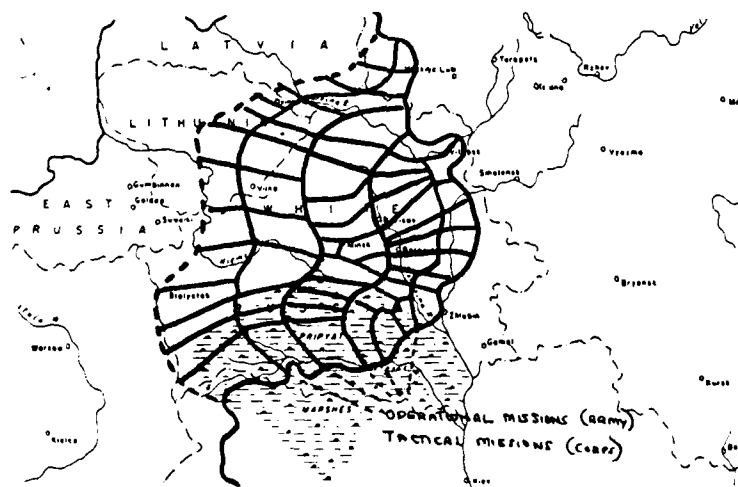
Map 1. The Soviet Concept of Directions (Axes)



BELORUSSIAN STRATEGIC OPERATION



FRONT OPERATIONS AND OPERATIONAL PHASES



ARMY OPERATIONS

Map 2. Soviet Analysis of Operations

offensive in its later phases. This building-block approach to the planning and conduct of the operation, within the strategic, operational, and tactical framework, provided an orderly and timely approach to solving a problem of immense complexity. The Belorussian strategic operation was a major success, for Soviet forces completed the destruction of German Army Group Center's three armies in less than three weeks and, within two months, had reached and penetrated the Polish and East Prussian borders, in doing so erasing more than 400,000 men from German strength in the East.

CONCLUSIONS

The Soviet framework for operations is both comprehensive and useful. It integrates the factor of geography with the decisive requirements of aim and mission, and it categorizes forces and units based upon the combat functions they are called upon to perform. In addition, the functional framework subdividing warfare into strategic, operational, and tactical levels embraces a host of other military considerations including such diverse areas as planning, deception, the grouping and regrouping of forces, the conduct of maneuver, and the role of reserves. The Soviets use precise terms to distinguish between the fielding and deployment of military forces to engage in combat actions within each level of war. Thus, at the strategic level, the Soviets carry out strategic deployment of forces [strategicheskoe razvertiyvanie], at the operational level they array their forces in operational formation [operativnoe postroenie], and at the tactical level they deploy forces in combat formation [boevoi poriadok].

Likewise, the Soviets describe maneuver as strategic, operational, and tactical; and they form strategic, operational, and tactical reserves. Each of these terms is unique to the level of war it describes and involves specific actions and techniques geared to that level.

No single term in this framework can be understood without understanding the relationship of all the terms and the broader relationship of the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war. Such an understanding provides a necessary context for studying Soviet operations and operational art, and the Soviet approach to the conduct of war in general.

This Soviet framework for operations, with its seemingly complex array of levels and terms, is the result of long-term study and reflection of the nature of war. It is a true distillate of vast military experience, and it is that experience which gives it validity. Because of that study and reflection, the terminology automatically has meaning to those who have properly studied war. The logic of the structure will be apparent to all those who wish to understand how and why the Soviet Army operates the way it does.

NOTES

1. N. N. Kuznetsov, "Strategicheskaya tsel'" [Strategic aim] Sovetskaya Voennaya Entsiklopediya [Soviet Military Encyclopedia], Vol 7 (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1979), 552. Hereafter cited at SVE with appropriate date, volume, and page; see also N. V. Ogarkov, et al, ed., Voennyi Entsiklopedicheski Slovar' [Military Encyclopedic Dictionary], (Moskva: Voenizdat, 1983), 710. Hereafter cited as VES with appropriate page. A second edition, published in 1986, does not substantially alter these definitions.
2. "Teatr voyny" [The theater of war] SVE, 1980, 8:9.; M.M. Kozlov, "Teatr voennykh deistvii" [The theater of military operations], SVE, 8:8-9; VES, 732. Although the Soviets define a theater of war, it is neither a current Soviet concept nor is it a distinct level of command.
3. "Strategicheskoe napravlenie" [The strategic direction], SVE, 1979, 7:555; VES, 711.
4. "Strategicheskaya zadacha" [The strategic mission], SVE, 1979, 7:550; VES, 710.
5. "Operatsionnoe napravlenie" [The operational direction], SVE, 1978, 6:64; VES, 516.
6. "Operativnaya zadacha" [The operational mission], SVE, 1979, 6:50; VES, 514.
7. VES, 516; M. M. Kir'yan, "Operatsiya" [The operation] SVE, 1978, 6:64-67. The Soviets also recognize the term "campaign" [Kampaniya] as "a series of strategic operations and other forms of military actions in a continental or ocean theater of military operations united by an overall concept and directed at the achievement of important military-political aims." The campaign represents a separate stage of war usually designated by calendar limits (year, season) and the name of a country or region which the theater of military operations encompasses. The campaign, lacking a unifying plan, is a more general term than operation. The Soviets have deemphasized its use as an analytical category in the post-war years. See M. I. Cherednichenko, "Kampaniya" [The campaign], SVE, 1977, 9:55-56.
8. VES, 516.
9. M. I. Cherednichenko, "Strategicheskaya operatsiya" [The strategic operation] SVE, 1979, 7:551-552; VES, 710.
10. VES, 710. This qualification does not appear in the Soviet Military Encyclopedia definition of 1979.

11. Ibid., 787; M. M. Kozlov "Frontovaia nastupatel'naia operatsiia" [The front offensive operation], SVE, 1980, 8:336.
12. VES, 787.
13. Ibid., 788; M. M. Kozlov, "Frontovaia oboronitel'naia operatsiia" [The front defensive operation], SVE, 1980, 8:339.
14. M. M. Kir'yan, "Armeiskaia nastupatel'naia operatsiia" [The army offensive operation], SVE, 1976, 1:239; VES, 43; K. L. Kusch-Zarko, "Armeiskaia oboronitel'naia operatsiia" [The army defensive operation], SVE, 1976, 1:245.
15. VES, 505; "Ob'edinenie" [The large unit, union], SVE, 1978, 5:679-680.
16. VES, 688; G. A. Parkhalin, "Soedinenie" [A formation, combination], SVE, 1979, 7:426-427.